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XII. — *The Story of the Strix: Ancient*

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THIS study began as a commentary on a passage in the *Pseudolus* of Plautus, for which meagre information was found in commentator or lexicographer. The legend was discovered to be so widely ramified in ancient, mediaeval and modern literature, so persistent and pervasive in the folk-lore of Europe, and so richly diversified by the synchasy of other legends and folk-tales that it seemed desirable to attempt to gather together the multifarious details and weave them into some adequate tissue. This first part of the story considers only those fragments of it to be found in the classical writers of Greece and Rome.

In the *Ὀρυθρογυία* of Boio<sup>1</sup> was told the story of Polyphonte which Antoninus Liberalis has preserved in his *Μεταμορφώσεων συναγωγή* (21). This may be summarized as follows:

Polyphonte, daughter of Hipponoos and Thraissa, spurned Aphrodite and went to the mountains as the companion of Artemis in her sports. Angered by the insult, the slighted goddess caused her to become madly enamored of a bear. Upon discovering her plight, Artemis in bitter hatred turned the wild beasts against her. Then Polyphonte fled in fear to her father's house and in due time gave birth to two sons, Agrios and Oreios. These became men of huge size and immense strength. They showed no honor to god or man, but were wantonly insolent towards all. They bore away all strangers they came upon and feasted on their flesh. Thus they incurred the wrath of Zeus, who sent Hermes to punish them. He was going to cut off their hands and feet, but Ares, to whom Polyphonte traced her lineage, saved them from this fate. Both mother and sons, however, were transformed into birds. Polyphonte became "a strix that cries by

<sup>1</sup> Called Boios by Antoninus (*l.c.*), as also by Alexander of Myndos in Athen. ix, 393e; but Boio by Philochorus in Athen. (*l.c.*) and by Pausanias, x, 5, 4.

night, without food or drink, with head below and tips of feet above, a harbinger of war and civil strife to men." Oreios became a λαγῶς, "a bird that is seen for no good," and Agrios was changed into a vulture, "of all birds most detested by gods and men and possessed of a constant craving for human flesh and blood."

As this work of Boio was known to Philochorus,<sup>2</sup> this story can hardly be later than the end of the fourth century B.C. In it are found, explicit or implicit, all the essential characteristics of the uncontaminated legend of the strix. Thus,

A. As woman she is 1. a votary of Artemis (Diana, Herodias, Habonde, Holda, etc.). 2. An Aphrodisian. In Boio, by poetic refinement, this is a penalty for spurning Aphrodite. The element is especially pronounced in the mediaeval *concupitus daemonum* and the orgies of the Sabbat. 3. Connected with magic and witchcraft. This is suggested by the eponymous names, Strymon, Thraissa and Triballos, in the genealogical introduction<sup>3</sup> to the story, as these point to the Macedonian-Thracian region,—a land κατ' ἐξοχήν of mages and witches—as its homeland. Later as woman she is regularly a witch.

B. As bird, she has the salient characteristics of a bat,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Athen. *l.c.*: Βοῖος δ' ἐν Ὀρνιθογονίᾳ, ἡ Βοιώ, ὡς φησιν Φιλόχορος, κτλ.

<sup>3</sup> Τερέλινος τῆς Στρώμονος καὶ Ἀρεως ἐγένετο θυγάτηρ Θρᾷσσα. ταύτην δ' ἔγημεν Ἰππώνους ὁ Τριβάλλου παῖς καὶ αὐτοῖς ἐγένετο θυγάτηρ ὄνομα Πολυφόντη. Ant. Lib. *l.c.*

<sup>4</sup> To the ancients in general, as to many at the present time, the bat is a bird. Cf. Ant. Lib. x, 4; Lucian, *Ver. Hist.* ii, 33; Pliny, *N.H.* xi, 164 and 232; Aelian, *H.N.* i, 37; vi, 45. Aristotle alone is doubtful. In *de Part. Animal.* iv, 13, he considers it intermediate between τὰ πτηνὰ and τὰ περὶ αἶμα. Cf. his *H.N.* i, 487 b, 488 a, 490 a; iii, 511 a. The popular conception is well expressed in the second verse of the *νυκτερίδος αἶνος* of Panarces, known to Plato (*Rep.* v, 479) and preserved in Suidas and Athenaeus, x, 76, —

Αἶνός τίς ἐστιν, ὡς ἀνὴρ τε οὐκ ἀνὴρ  
θρῆθα, κοῦκ θρῆθα, θρῆθα δ' ὅμως,  
ἐπὶ ξύλου τε κοῦ ξύλου καθημένην  
λίθῳ τε κοῦ λίθῳ βαλὼν διώλεσεν.

In Belon's *Hist. de la Nat. des Oyseaux*, "the most important ornithological treatise of the 16th century," we find "La Souris Chauve est un oiseau de nuit." In fact John Ray, "the Father of Modern Zoölogy," was the first to refute the error. Many still suppose the bat to be a kind of bird and to be feathered.

(1) nocturnal; (2) a harbinger of evil; (3) φθεγγομένη, aptly descriptive of the "sharp, stridulous scream" of a bat in flight; (4) ἄτερ σίτου καὶ ποτοῦ, the asitia of a bat in its long, hibernal torpidity; (5) τὴν κεφαλὴν ἴσχουσα κάτω, τοὺς δὲ πόδας ἄκρους ἄνω, obviously a bat at rest.

C. As woman-bird, she is (1) hated by gods and men; (2) possessed of a craving for human flesh and blood. Boio transfers this quality to her offspring in human form, to Agrios alone in avian form.

We find each of these recurrent in later folk-tales of the strix.

On the Latin side we find the first mention of the strix in the *Pseudolus* of Plautus, where the cook in decrying his rivals exclaims :

Ei homines cenas ubi coquont, quom condiunt,  
Non condimentis condiunt, sed strigibus,<sup>5</sup>  
Viuis conuiuis intestina quae exedint. (819-821)

This is the earliest mention of the strix to which any exact date — 191 B.C. — can be affixed. If, however, as I believe,<sup>6</sup> much of this scene is from a Greek original belonging to the Middle Comedy of the fourth century, this allusion may be as old as the work of Boio. However that may be, the mere glimpse afforded by the passage brings into clearer detail the anthropophagism of the strix. It devours the viscera of its

<sup>5</sup> It is a curious parallel that *Strega* or *Liquore Strega* is now found on the menu of many of our Italian restaurants. This is a mild and sweet cordial, "only slightly alcoholic," made at Benevento, the supposed rendezvous, for ages, of all the *streghe* or witches of Italy. Hence the name of the cordial. The composition of this proprietary article is, of course, a trade secret, but the American representatives of the manufacturers authorize me to state that its distinctive qualities are due to an infusion of aromatic herbs and spices. Punch Strega, Strega Sherbet, Strega Frappée, Strega Highball, etc., contain this cordial as an essential ingredient. It is used also as a condiment in sauces for salads, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Among the *Philologische Thesen* suggested by Theodor Bergk in the *Rh. M.* xx (1865), 290, we find: "Der Pseudolus der Plautus ist nach einem Stücke der mittleren Komödie bearbeitet." Not finding that any one has taken this up, I have collected considerable material that supports it. The evidence seems especially strong for this second scene of the third act.

victims while they are still alive. This feature recurs frequently.

Titinius in one of his unknown *togatae* has given us the only other early Latin reference to the strix. This has been preserved in the *Liber Medicinalis* of Quintus Serenus Sammonicus. In the chapter entitled "Infantibus dentibus vel strige inquietatis," the learned antiquarian, after prescribing for the teething child, adds :

Praeterea si forte premit strix atra puellos  
Virosa immulgens exertis ubera labris,  
Alia praecepit Titini sententia necti,  
Qui veteri claras expressit more togatas.<sup>7</sup>

This passage makes Titinius authority for the belief, in the second century B.C., in a virose, mammalian strix, that is a bugbear of the nursery, and in the prophylaxis of a garlic charm. It also makes Sammonicus an authority for the continuance of the same belief in the third century A.D. Like the Boioan, the Titinian strix is plainly chiropterous. *Atra* is rather vague ; it may be dark in color, baneful or ominous, fell or malevolent, but *virosa*,<sup>8</sup> foul, ill-smelling, is distinctively apposite to the bat.

The connection with the nursery first occurs here. This new element is probably due to a syncretism of the Γελλώ legend. This is at least as old as Sappho. The paroemiographer Zenobius gives the reference and the story :

Γελλοῦς παιδοφιλωτέρα· ἐπὶ τῶν ἀώρως τελευτησάντων, ἧτοι ἐπὶ τῶν φιλοτέκνων μὲν, τρυφῇ δὲ διαφθειρόντων αὐτά. Γελλῶ γάρ τις ἦν παρθένος καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀώρως ἐτελεύτησε, φασὶν οἱ Λέσβιοι αὐτῆς τὸ φάντασμα ἐπιφοιτᾶν ἐπὶ τὰ παιδία, καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἀώρων θανάτους αὐτῇ ἀνατιθέασι. Μέννηται ταύτης Σαμφώ (*Cent.* III, 3).

<sup>7</sup> *Vid.* Baehrens' *Poet. Lat. Min.* III, 155, c. lviii, vv. 1035-8, or Ribbeck's *Scaen. Rom. Poesis Fragg.* II, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. "The strong musky odor exhaled, which fills the neighborhood of their haunts, is evidently protective." Theodore Gill, in *The Riverside Natural History*, v, 161. "The acrid odor of their bodies and of the deposits of their valuable coal black guano is almost overpowering." E. Ingersoll: *The Life of Animals ; the Mammals*, p. 62.

We shall find that the Γελλώ and the Στρίγλα are commonly identified in the Byzantine and the later Hellenic writers. The two legends preserved such elements in common that concrescence was all but inevitable. In our passage from Titinius we find the earliest extant trace of this. The folk-tales to be cited in the mediaeval and modern portions of our study will furnish the best commentary upon Titinius.

Our bird next appears in the realm of magic and witchcraft. Thus in Horace (*Epod.* 5, 19 ff.) we find among the ingredients of the magic charm that the witch Canidia prepares to win the affections of the aged Varus —

Et uncta turpis ova ranae sanguine  
Plumamque nocturnae strigis.

Likewise the Cynthia of Propertius (III, 6, 29) accuses her rival of using in a magic philtre to seduce the former's lover,

Et strigis inventae per busta iacentia plumae ;

and the old bawd Acanthis in IV, 5, 17, K, in her attempts to alienate the affections of Cynthia,

Consuluit striges nostro de sanguine.

Medea, too, in Ovid (*Met.* VII, 269), when preparing to restore the aged Aeson to youth, puts into her caldron —

Et strigis infames ipsis cum carnibus alas ;<sup>9</sup>

and when preparing the potent drugs in which she dips Creusa's bridal robe, she (Seneca, *Med.* 731 ff.)—

Miscetque et obscenas aves  
Maestique cor bubonis et raucae strigis  
Exsecta vivae viscera.

The strix was potent also in malediction.<sup>10</sup> So Tibullus (I, 5, 52), when he would requite the *callida lena* that procured a rich lover for his Delia, includes in his Ernulphan anathemas —

Et e tectis strix violenta canat.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* (tom. II, lib. 4, quaest. 4) : Insieme con carne e ali d' infamate streghe. *Opere Volgari* di G. Boccaccio, Firenze, 1829.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pliny, *infra*.

The full effect of such an awesome imprecation upon the superstitious *lena* can better be appreciated after reading that the strix was regarded as a veritable bird of hell and was there associated with the punishment of the damned. This view is presented by Seneca and Hyginus.

The former, in the *Hercules Furens* (686 ff.), describes the swamp of the "River of Wailing" —

Palus inertis foeda Cocyti iacet ;  
Hic vultur, illic luctifer bubo gemit  
Omenque triste resonat infaustae strigis.

The latter, in *Fabula* 28, describes the punishment of Otos and Ephialtes, who piled Ossa upon Pelion, or, according to others, offered violence to Artemis —

Ad columnam, aversi alter ab altero, serpentibus sunt deligati. Est strix<sup>11</sup> inter columnam sedens ad quam sunt deligati.

The belief in the Tartarean birds may give significance to the climactic order in Ovid's *Amores* (I, 12, 19 f.), where, in cursing his unlucky love-letter, the poet asserts that the tree from which the tablets had been made has surely afforded a gibbet for some wretched neck and crosses for the executioner, and adds :

Illa (*sc. arbor*) dedit turpes raucis bubonibus umbras ;  
Vulturis in ramis et strigis ova tulit.

The mantic art at times took cognizance of the strix. Thus in describing the incantations of the Thessalian Erictho, in her resort to necromancy to disclose the future to Sextus, Lucan vividly portrays her imitative utterances —

Latratus habet illa canum, gemitus luporum,  
Quod trepidus bubo, quod strix nocturna queruntur (vi, 688 ff.).

<sup>11</sup> Hyginus has the *v. l. styx*. The same variant is found also in Ant. Lib. *l.c.* It may be due to a popular etymology, "the hateful" bird. Even if it be the true reading, the avified Polyphonte is so clearly a bat and identical with the strix, that we must assume, for Ant. Lib. at least, the equivalence of the terms. While Hesychius, much later, defines στῦξ as ὁ σκῶψ τὸ θρνεον, he does not appear to know even this bird, as he also has σκῶπες· εἶδος ὀρνέων, οἱ δὲ κολοιοὺς. This proves no more for Boio, nearly a thousand years earlier, than does another gloss, roughly contemporary with Hesychius, — *strix*· στρουθὸς.

And in the *Thebais* of Statius among the *peiora omina* observed on Mount Apesas by Amphiaraus, *augur peritissimus*, and Melampus, *celeberrimus vates*, we find

Quin vultur et altis  
Desuper accipitres exultavere rapinis.  
Monstra volant, dirae stridunt in nube volucres,  
Nocturnaeque gemunt striges et feralia bubo,  
Damna canens (III, 508 ff.).

In all these passages, from Horace onward, commentators and lexicographers are wont to identify the strix with the screech owl. This is in supposed consonance with the scholion of Porphyrio on Horace (*l.c.*)—

Avis nocturna mali ominis—

and is doubtless furthered by the fact that the owl is *par excellence* the nocturnal bird of evil omen everywhere from Iceland to Madagascar and has been such since the night of time, save in ancient Athens alone. Furthermore it is mainly due to these passages that *Striges* has become the ornithological appellation of the entire sub-order of the owls.

The passages, however, afford no evidence as to the poets' conception of the identity or affinities of the strix. Horace and Ovid mention its eggs, but Ovid was a skeptic before and after this.<sup>12</sup> Horace and Propertius mention its feathers. Literally, eggs and feathers exclude the mammalian, chiropteran strix of Titinius, but it is natural to ascribe them to any bird, real or imaginary. Even our nightmare, for instance—a cousin-german<sup>13</sup> to the strix, by the way—has her nest, the mare's nest of current deprecation, and Irish folk-lore still believes in the eggs of bats and their potency in malignant charms.<sup>14</sup> These poets, often so felicitous in the choice of words, do not give us a single distinctive attribute of the strix. In Horace, Lucan, and Statius, it is simply *nocturna*;

<sup>12</sup> See *Amores*, I, 8, and *Fasti*, VI, 141 ff., quoted *infra*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e.g. Regino Prum, *De eccles. disciplinis*, II, ccclxiv, and Gervasius Tilleberiensis, *Otia Imperialia*, III, 86.

<sup>14</sup> See *Folk-lore*, XXII, 452.



in Ovid, *infamis*; in Seneca, *infausta* and *rauca*.<sup>15</sup> The *queruntur* of Lucan, *gemunt* of Statius, *resonat* of Seneca, and *canat* of Tibullus<sup>16</sup> are all too inclusive to distinguish between a bubonine and a vespertilionine strix. The *busta iacentia* of Propertius may favor the latter, as the bat frequently colonizes such places.<sup>17</sup> In Ovid, Seneca, and Statius, the *vultur* also, as well as the *bubo*, is associated with the strix. If, now, we may assume the identity<sup>18</sup> of the *λαγῶς* in Boio's story with the *bubo*, we shall find recurrent here the three birds of the Polyphonte myth. In that case their Plutonian haunts are the logical outcome of that myth. In all these passages the strix was, as to Porphyrio, a vague and undefined "nocturnal bird of evil omen." There is no compellent evidence for the screech owl.

There is, however, such evidence for the continuance of the Plautine and Titinian legend through this period. Thus the *locus classicus* of the strix is, in Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 131 ff. :—

Sunt avidae volucres ; non quae Phineia mensis  
Guttura fraudabant : sed genus inde trahunt.  
Grande caput : stantes oculi : rostra apta rapinae :  
Canities pennis, unguibus hamus inest.

<sup>15</sup> With *rauca*, cf. "the shrill sudden squeak" or "stridulous scream" of the bat. With *queruntur*, cf. *querellae*, of bats, Ov. *Mel.* IV, 413. With *gemunt*, cf. "the piteous cheeping" of bats. With *resonat*, cf. their "loud, incessant chattering," or shrill scream "piercing enough to be heard from afar."

<sup>16</sup> A commentary on the verse in Tibullus may be based upon Ov. *Mel.* IV, 414, — *tectaque, non silvas celebrant*, — and the fact that the bat was a hell-bird. Gill (*op. cit.*, 160) and the author of the article *Vespertilio* in Rees' *Cyclopaedia* say it was consecrated by the Greeks to Proserpine. I recall no explicit statement to this effect in the classical authors, but several lend presumptive corroboration. So also in mediaeval and modern times. Cf. the leathern bat-wings of the Devil and the fiends of hell in Christian art (see some fine examples in Doré's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*), and the bat as sacred to Saturn in mediaeval occult philosophy (see H. C. Agrippa, *De occ. phil.*, ed. Lugdun., 1531, p. 40, where he says "To Saturn belong things once consecrated to Dis," and then gives the bat among the *Saturniae aves*). Cf. also the Norse *Edda*, in which the bat is the messenger of Hel, the goddess of darkness and death, and is feared as such (see Oswald, *op. cit.*, p. 120). Cf. also our "Hoosier Poet" on *The Bat*, — "Thou Devil's self, or brat, at least."

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "The rock tombs and temples of India and the tombs and pyramids of Egypt are thronged with various bats." E. Ingersoll, *l.c.*

<sup>18</sup> The writer has in preparation an article on this identification.

Nocte volant, puerosque petunt nutricis egentes :  
 Et vitiant cunis corpora rapta suis.  
 Carpere dicuntur lactentia viscera rostris ;  
 Et plenum poto sanguine guttur habent.  
 Est illis strigibus nomen ; sed nominis huius  
 Causa, quod horrenda stridere nocte solent.

We do not assume that Ovid was necessarily conscious of it, but it is none the less a fact that every item<sup>19</sup> of this de-

<sup>19</sup> We may examine them in detail thus:—

1. *Avidae*: the bat is notoriously voracious. Among the many stories illustrating this we may cite that of Dobson (*Monograph of the Asiatic Chiroptera*, p. 25), who tells us of a little *Cynonycteris marginatus*, weighing but an ounce, that ate twice its own weight of food in three hours. See also Oswald, *Zoölogical Sketches*, p. 125 f.

2. *Genus inde trahunt*: the myth of the Phœnean harpyia and that of the strix possess common elements and sometimes syncretize. The bat is the best explanation of the Vergilian harpy. Cf. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Cours de l'hist. nat. des Mammif.*, XIII<sup>e</sup> leçon, p. 22: "Virgile aurait-il connu ces grandes chauve-souris? Ce qu'il dit des ailes, des griffes et de la voracité des Harpyes, leur convient de toutes manières." Also Buffon, *Hist. Nat.; Mammifères*, tom. v, 55: "Les ailes, les dents, les griffes; la cruauté, la voracité, la saleté, tous les attributs difformes, toutes les facultés nuisibles des harpies, conviennent assez à nos roussettes." See also E. Ingersoll (*op cit.*, p. 67). Harpyia is now the zoölogical designation of a genus of the Chiroptera.

3. *Grande caput*: the general appearance of many species because of their long ears. The ear of the *Plecotus auritus*, common in Europe, is about equal in length to its entire body.

4. *Stantes oculi*: apt description of the small but bright, beady, staring eye of the bat. Cf. Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 168, examining an *Atalapha noveboracensis* by a bright light in the evening: "The lids are not brought entirely together and a narrow band of the little bright eye is constantly visible. Touch the bat now gently. The eyelids open and the eye pops out suddenly as if it would escape from its socket. It does not merely look out on the external world from its cell, but pushes itself outward so that about half its circumference is external to the skin." Gill states that this phenomenon is "probably common to other species as well." The *Atalapha* is found in southern Europe.

5. *Rostra apta rapinae*: the muzzle, teeth, and entire manducatory apparatus of the bat is adapted to quick and effective work. Dobson (*l.c.*) speaks of the bat as "a kind of living mill." Cf. Oswald, *l.c.*, for other details.

6. *Canities pennis*: brown and gray are the usual colors of the bat. Cf. also the etymology of *chauve-souris* given by Diez and Littré.

7. *Unguibus hamus inest*: a long and much-hooked claw is attached to the pollex in all species and many have such a claw also on the second digit. See Oswald, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

8. *Nocte volant*: nearly all species are nocturnal or at least crepuscular. Cf.

scription applies in an especial manner to the bat, the Boioan and Titinian strix.

Ovid is in doubt in the lines that follow whether these birds are produced by nature or are the creation of magic, hags<sup>20</sup> transformed into birds by the spells and charms of the Marsi. He then tells this tale: —

When Procas, child of the Latin king, was but five days old,<sup>21</sup> these striges, slipping into his chamber, flew to his cradle and began to suck his heart's blood. The nurse, absent at the moment, heard his cries and ran to his aid. She found on the infant's tender cheeks the traces of their cruel

the names *νυκτερίς* and *vespertilio* and see Symphosius, *Aenigmata*, 28: Nox mihi dat nomen, primo de tempore noctis.

9. *Pueros petunt*: the Titinian legend of the strix.

10. *Plenum sanguine*: Some species are sanguivorous. Dobson (*op. cit.*, p. 77 n., quoting Blyth in *J.A.S.B.*, vol. xi) tells of a *Megaderma lyra* that caught a small *Vespertilio*, sucked all its blood and then greedily devoured it. Gill (*op. cit.*, p. 173) found the stomach of a *Macrotus waterhousii* full of coagulated blood, part of which was in the intestine. Cf. Cuvier, *Tableau élément. de l'hist. nat. des animaux*, l. II, c. 3, § 1, p. 104: "Ce sont de très grandes chauve-souris des Indes et de l'Afrique: elles égalent la taille de nos poules. On prétend qu'elles sucent le sang des hommes et des animaux endormis." See the story of the Arabian bats and the cassia hunters in Herodotus, III, 110, which Pliny (*N.H.* XII, 19, 42, 85) pronounces fabulous, and suggests as its motive, "his commentis augentes rerum pretia." See also the story of the encounter of the soldiers of Alexander and the bats of India, told by Jehan Wauquelin in his *Merveilles d'Inde* (see Jules Berger de Xivrey, *Traditions Têratologiques*, p. 396 ff.): "Avec ces bestes revinrent cauves-soris, ensi grandes comme on diroit coullons, et avoient dens comme on diroit dens d'omme. Lesquelles soris-cauves frapoient les gens de l'ost parmy le visage et leur firent moult de paine."

11. *Horrenda stridere solent*: Cf. Auctor *Philomelae* (*AL.* 762, 39, Riese), Strix nocturna sonans et vespertilio stridit.

The Cognate *τρίζω* is used of the bat in the *Odyssey*, *ω*, 7, and the writer of the article *Vespertilio* in Rees' *Cyclopædia*, XXXVII, says they utter "a sharp, stridulous note or scream during their flight." Cf. Ovid, *Met.* IV, 413.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Amores*, I, 8, 13 ff., he had suspected the mode of metamorphosis from human into strigine form, for he speaks thus of the old hag Dipsas who had rare skill in magic art:

Hanc ego nocturnas versam volitare per umbras  
Suspitor, et plumis corpus anile tegi.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the later belief that unbaptized babes are the special victims of the striges.

claws. His color was already that of the sere and withered leaf on the approach of winter. Forthwith she ran to the nymph Carna and besought her aid. Carna assures her of the safety of her charge and accompanies her to the cradle. After bidding the sorrowing parents to stay their tears, as she will find a remedy, she thrice in due order touches the jambs of the door and thrice its threshold with the leafy branch of an arbutus tree. Then with water made potent by a drug placed in it, she sprinkles the entrance, and taking in her hand the entrails of a pig, two months old, she speaks this conjuration: "Spare, ye birds of the night, the vitals of the child. Take heart for heart, I pray, and entrails for entrails. This life we give to you in lieu of the better one." She lays these in the open air and allows no one to look around<sup>22</sup> at them. Then she places in the window the twig of white thorn (*spina alba*) which Janus had given her, and then the birds could no more come in. After this the child soon regained his color.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The averted face is a mark of respect to chthonian powers. Cf. Hom.  $\kappa$ , 528.

<sup>23</sup> In that mountain district of North Italy known as *La Romagna Toscana*, C. G. Leland (*Etruscan Roman Remains*, ch. vi, p. 107 ff.) found a variant of this story still extant among the *streghe*. Carna there appears as Carradora, who in her life was *una strega buona* and protected infants against evil witches. The story is as follows:—

"There was once in the country a lady who had a small baby. It was a pretty child, but day by day it began to weaken, nor did the mother know what to do. Then she was advised to go to Carradora, who could explain it all because she was a witch who did good as well as harm.

"Then the lady went to the witch, who said: 'Go to thy home and put the babe to bed and put a knife in the window and then return to me.' So the lady did and returned to Carradora, who said: 'Witches come by night to suck the blood of thy child and it must be prevented.' Then the witch took *corbezzolo* (arbutus) and thorns (*spina alba*) and put them into red bags and bound them to the door-posts and windows, and then took the entrails of a very small pig (*un maialino*) and said:—

'Questi sono gl' interiori  
D' un piccolo maiale,  
Che servono per le streghe  
Discacciar, e gl' interiori  
Di si bella bambina  
Sono giovani quanto lei cara,

Ovid tells only so much of the folk-lore of the strix as fits his story of Carna, in which it is the chief episode. The Plautine legend is better represented by Petronius Arbiter (63). Here Trimalchio, after promising his guests a harrowing tale, proceeds:—

“While I was yet a long-haired lad, for from boyhood I led a Chian life, our master’s minion died, a pearl, by Hercules, a paragon and perfect in every regard. While his poor mother was bewailing him and several of us were sorrowing, suddenly the striges began to scream (*stridere*). You would have thought a hound was on the chase of a hare. We had at that time a Cappadocian, a strapping, dare-devil fellow, so strong that he could lift an angry bull. He, carefully wrapping his mantle about his left arm, dashed fearlessly out the door, with drawn sword, and as it were in this spot—May that be safe which I touch!—ran a woman through the middle. We heard a groan, but,—I swear, I’m not lying!—we did not see the striges themselves. Back came our blockhead and threw himself upon a bed. His entire body was as black and blue as if he had been beaten with the cat, for forsooth an evil hand had touched him. We closed the door and returned to our mourning, but when the mother would embrace the body of her son, she touched and saw only a dummy made of straw. It had neither heart, nor insides, nor anything at all. The striges had in sooth already carried off the boy and had substituted an oaf of straw. What think ye? You must believe it. They are women over-wise. They are night hags; they make every thing topsy-turvy. But as for that tall lout of ours, after what happened then, he never came to his color again, but died a few days later, a raving maniac.”

This story has some new features, not found again for several centuries.

Ed e proprio ad atta  
Per amare. E le corne  
Alle strege bisogna fare,  
Che qui dentro non possino più entrare.’

“Then Carradora took the child and made a skein of thread and threw it in the air, and so it was cured.”

Thus the story preserves many of the details of Ovid’s. As the chief source of Ovid in this work was the *Fasti* of the antiquarian Verrius Flaccus, the story of Procas and the striges may be very old.

1. While the striges frequently kill and consume more or less of the bodies of their victims, here they feast on the body of one already dead from natural causes.

2. The fate that overtakes an assailant of the strigine woman.

3. The substitution of a *stramenticius vavato*.

Petronius, however, knows that the striges prey also upon the marrow of the living, as in 134 the old dame Proselenos asks the impuissant Polyænus,

*Quæ striges comederunt nervos tuos ?*

The elder Pliny brings us back to solid ground. After stating that only viviparous animals have mammae and that of birds only the bat is lactific, he adds :

Fabulosum enim arbitror de strigibus ubera eas infantium labris immulgere ; esse in maledictis iam antiquis strigem convenit, sed quæ sit avium constare non arbitror (*N.H.* xi, 232).

Here is strong corroborative evidence for our surmise of the mythical character of the strix in the Augustan and later poets. Pliny was an antiquarian, but he found no bubonine strix in his ancient sources. He found the Titinian strix, but rightly deemed it fabulous. His skepticism, however, availed little or naught against the prevalent superstition. The popular belief would not down.

How many of the Latin passages quoted in the foregoing were derived from Greek originals, we shall probably never know. As many of the writers drew freely from such sources, several of the references to the strix may ultimately have been Hellenic in origin. But in all the long period from Homer to the rise of the patristic literature, I have found no reference to the strix assignable to a definite Greek author, save to Boio alone. The reasonable inference from the early glossographers — whose testimony must be reserved for a later occasion — shows the continued existence of the folk-belief. We have, moreover, explicit testimony to this effect in the remains of Verrius Flaccus, as preserved by Festus (314, 33 Müller):

Strigem<sup>24</sup> (ut ait Verrius) Graeci syrnia<sup>25</sup> appellant, quod maleficis mulieribus nomen inditum est, quas volaticas etiam vocant. Itaque solent his verbis eas veluti avertere Graeci :

Συρριντα πομπειν νυκτικομαν στριντατολαον ορνιν ανωνυμιον ωκυπορους επι νηας.

As emended<sup>26</sup> in Smyth's *Melic Poets*, p. 158, this becomes :

Στρίγγ' ἀποπομπεῖν νυκτιβόαν, στρίγγ' ἀπὸ λαῶν,  
ὄρνιν ἀνωνυμίαν ὠκυπόρους ἐπὶ νῆας, —

a fragment from an apotropaic folk-ditty used in exorcism of the στρίγγξ.

One Greek story, however, requires brief mention, as it is the evident model for later stories of the aporneosis of the striga. This is found in the Λούκιος ἡ ὄνος attributed to Lucian. In the twelfth chapter of this work the author tells us how the magicienne in her boudoir strips herself and stands by a lamp, burning incense and talking much to herself. Then opening a strong cabinet containing numerous pyxides, she selects one of these and proceeds to anoint herself all over with what seems to be an oil. Suddenly wings began to grow and her nose became horny and hooked and she assumed all the properties of a κόραξ νυκτερινός. Then rising on full wing, with a fearful cawing, she flew out of the window in quest of her lover.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Gubernatis, *Zool. Myth.*, 202, says: "Festus derives the word strix a *stringendo*, from the received opinion that they throttle children." Festus does say: "Strigae appellabantur ordines rerum inter se continue conlocatarum a stringendo dictae," — a very different *striga* from that of Gubernatis and that of our theme. This curious error of Gubernatis may be the source of that of Mr. Charles de Kay (*Bird Gods*, 168 f.): "Piiny explains the name of the '*infanda, improba strix*' by the verb *stringere*, to throttle, because the evil bird throttles babes in the cradle." I have not found such a statement in Pliny or any other Latin author.

<sup>25</sup> Σύρνια is otherwise unknown in the ancient literature. It is now the ornithological designation of one of the genera of *striges*, or owls.

<sup>26</sup> Emendations proposed by Bergk, Müller, and Scaliger differ only in detail and all depart farther from the reading of Festus.

<sup>27</sup> The sequel shows the peculiar virtue of the unguent, for when Lucius, after witnessing the entire procedure through a crack of the door, tried to imitate it,

The story was retold by the Magus of Madaura in his *Met.* (III, 21) and became widely known in either tongue. It is only one of the many metamorphosis stories current at the time. Its only bearing on the story of the strix is to illustrate a supposed *modus operandi* of the witch in assuming avian form.

The ancient literature of Greece and Rome during the seven centuries from Boio to Sammonicus presents us a fairly consistent view of the strix. The bird is clearly mythical; but the physical characteristics with which the fancy of the ancients invested it were those of a bat and not those of an owl, as so generally supposed.<sup>28</sup> Every attribute ascribed to it, except the generic eggs and feathers—still sometimes ascribed to the bat—belong to the bat, many of them in some especial or peculiar way. Some of them belong to nothing else that flies. The bird is vampiric, but never a true vampire, *i.e.* a revenant, but the result of a fabulous metamorphosis. Though mediaeval and modern folk-tales do not in general ascribe any distinctive physical characteristics to the striga or *σπίγγλα* in avian form, yet there are occasional outcroppings of the legendary vespertilionine qualities. Indeed, one contemporary folk-tale, *Il Figliuolo del re, stregato*,<sup>29</sup> expressly states that the souls of the three beautiful sisters fare forth for *stregeria* as three pipistrelles.

Assuming as the ancients did the possibility of a metamorphosis from human into avian or other form, what was *a priori* more natural than to consider the bat the result of such a transformation? Did not Aristophanes<sup>30</sup> nickname through mistaking the box, he turned himself, not into the desired bird, but into a long-eared ass. Several formulae are given by mediaeval writers for *Strigarum* (*Lamiarum*) *Unguentum*. In general, infants' fat and narcotic plants are the essentials. So in that "Iliad of Strigism," the *Malleus Maleficarum* (II, I, 3) — "Unguentum ex membris puerorum interemptorum ab eis ante baptismum." Cf. Southey: *The Old Woman of Berkeley*: "I have 'nointed myself with infants' fat."

<sup>28</sup> The common misconception seems due to (1) a too restricted view of the evidence; (2) acceptance of mediaeval conjectures; and (3) too little knowledge of that really interesting "bird," the bat.

<sup>29</sup> See Domenico Comparetti: *Novelline Popolari Italiane*.

<sup>30</sup> *Aves*, 1296, 1564.



the sallow, cadaverous<sup>81</sup> Chaerephon ἡ νυκτερίς? Did not Homer (ω, 5 ff.) compare the souls of Penelope's wooers as they were led off to Hades to cheeping bats? Did not Chaerophon "the Bat" come up to suck the victim's blood<sup>82</sup> as the ghosts<sup>83</sup> did in the Νέκυια of the *Odyssey*? Did not the great Linnaeus himself, because of the resemblance in dentition and such external phenomena as the thoracic position of the mammae, etc., place the bat along with man in the order Primates? Did not his early successors, delving deeper, yet because of placental and uterine characteristics continue the same taxonomic assignment? Do not the Arabs<sup>84</sup> believe that while man is the crown and glory of God's original creation, the bat was the one special creation of Jesus, because an animal so perfect in its teeth, its ears, its mammae, its entire make-up in fact, could not have been a part of the primitive creation? May not the very paucity of ancient Greek and Roman folk-lore of the bat in the classics be in some measure due to an early consciousness of the association with the strix?<sup>85</sup>

The legend of the woman-bat was early contaminated with that of the Γελλώ. This in turn has strong affinities with those of the Hellenic Lamia, the Slavonic vampire, the Hebrew Lilith, the Arabic Ghūl, etc. We find the later legends of the strix incorporating the cardinal characteristics of each of these as well as those of a half score of others, originally distinct.

<sup>81</sup> Ἐπει ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ὠχρὸς τὴν ἰδέαν ὁ Χαιρεφῶν· ὅθεν νυκτερίς ἐκαλεῖτο καὶ πύξιμος. Schol. ad Nub. 504.

<sup>82</sup> Assuming αἷμα in *Aves*, 1563.

<sup>83</sup> Souls of the dead still appear as bats in the folk-lore of places as far asunder as Germany and Torres Straits, *Folk-lore*, XIX, 235, 484; I, 79.

<sup>84</sup> Vid. Bochart, *Hierozyicon*, pt. II, l. II, c. xxxii, p. 351, for Arabic texts and translations.

<sup>85</sup> One bat story has some striking parallelisms to that of Polyphonte. It is that of the Minyadae, told by Antoninus Liberalis, x (after Nicander and Corinna), Ovid (*Met.* IV, 1-42, 389-415), Aelian (*Var. Hist.* III, 42) and by Plutarch (*Quaest. Graec.* 38). Over zealous in the service of one deity, they spurn another, by whom they are punished with madness and a hunger for human flesh. To satisfy this they rend a child asunder. They are metamorphosed by Hermes, all three to bats (Ov.) or one to a bat and the others to crow and owl (Ael.) or γλαυῆξ and βύξα (Ant. Lib.), and flee the light.

As our leading etymologists, *e.g.* Walde and Prellwitz, agree upon the cognation of strix and στρίγξ, we may see a piece of prehistoric folk-lore in the story of the strix, having its primal origin in the phenomena of dreams and of animism, which are also the ultimate sources of most of its later accretions.